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MARYLAND BRIEFING

Panel Backs Silver Spring Music Hall

The Montgomery County Council yesterday recommended spending \$2 million to create a live music venue in downtown Silver Spring, despite concerns among some members that the operator would pay below-market rent and that taxpayers could be on the hook for cost overruns.

County Executive Isiah Leggett's administration has signed a deal with music producer Live Nation to open a venue in 2010 at the former J.C. Penney site on Colesville Road. The project relies on \$4 million in county funds and \$4 million in state money.

Council vice president Phil Andrews (D-Gaithersburg-Rockville) urged colleagues yesterday to "send a clear message to the state that we support this project."

Leggett administration officials said they expect the venue to be a money-maker within six years. It would not require an ongoing subsidy.

Council member Roger Berliner (D-Bethesda-Potomac) opposed the deal. "This is not just a faulty process, but a faulty project," he said. Berliner and others have asked Leggett (D) to consider an alternative offer from Bethesda-based IMP, which owns the 9:30 Club in the District, that would not require any taxpayer funds.

The council's recommendation yesterday is an indication of how it intends to vote on the county's capital budget for bricks-and-mortar projects this spring.

— Ann E. Marimow